

NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES
ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney
Carol C. Lam***

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For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - December 6, 2004

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced today the unsealing of an Indictment charging Yervand ASRIYANTS, Charles Edward ALTAMOS II, Suren CHAMIAN, George LEYFER, and Justin PELTIER with conspiracy to induce illegal aliens to enter the United States and conspiracy to transport illegal aliens. The Indictment also charges ASRIYANTS and ALTAMOS with bringing illegal aliens into the United States for private financial gain, and inducing illegal aliens to enter the United States. Also today, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested ASRIYANTS, ALTAMOS, LEYFER, and PELTIER on the charges contained in the Indictment. The FBI and ICE also executed a search warrant at ASRIYANTS' residence.

According to the Indictment, the alien smuggling conspiracy spanned from as early as December 2001 to March 2004, and involved the bringing of Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Polish citizens from Mexico into the United States, primarily by vehicle through the Ports of Entry. The Indictment charges ASRIYANTS as the leader and organizer of the criminal activity.

According to Assistant United States Attorney William Cole, who is prosecuting the case, ASRIYANTS faces up to 15 years in prison. ALTAMOS, CHAMIAN, LEYFER, and PELTIER each face a maximum of ten years in prison.

United States Attorney Lam said, "In light of world events, we have heightened concern about sophisticated smuggling rings that bring in people from various countries through Mexico."

Daniel Dzwilewski, Special Agent in Charge, San Diego Division of the FBI said, "The FBI specializes in dismantling criminal organizations. Criminal organizations involved in alien smuggling are capable of facilitating terrorism, and as such, are considered a significant priority to the FBI. We have in the past, and will in the future, combine our assets with the talents and resources of ICE to eradicate these criminal alien-smuggling enterprises."

"When we aggressively enforce immigration laws, we strengthen our nation's security," said Michael Unzueta, Acting Special Agent in Charge for ICE investigations in San Diego. "Today's operation is a good example of ICE and the FBI working together to combat dangerous and lucrative alien smuggling organizations that have no regard for human life or public safety - they are in it to make a buck."

ASRIYANTS and ALTAMOS appeared in court today before United States Magistrate Judge James F. Stiven and were arraigned on the Indictment. They are each scheduled to appear in court before United States District Judge Irma E. Gonzalez on December 13, 2004. Also, the United States moved to detain ASRIYANTS without bail, and he is scheduled to appear in court for a detention hearing before Judge Stiven on December 9, 2004, at 1:30 p.m.

LEYFER and PELTIER are expected to appear in court before Judge Stiven on December 7, 2004, at 1:30 p.m.

DEFENDANTS

Criminal Case No. 04 CR 3084 IEG

Yervand Asriyants

Charles Edward Altamos II

Suren Chamian
(aka Souren Tchamian)

George Leyfer

Justin Peltier

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 8, United States Code, Section 1324(a)(1)(A)(v)(I) - Conspiracy to Induce Illegal Aliens to Enter the United States and Conspiracy to Transport Illegal Aliens.

Maximum penalties: 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Title 8, United States Code, Section 1324(a)(2)(B)(ii) and Title 18, United States Code, Section 2 - Bringing in Illegal Aliens for Financial Gain and Aiding and Abetting.

Maximum penalties: A minimum of three years in prison and a maximum of 10 years in prison for the first and second offense; a minimum of five years in prison and a maximum of 15 years in prison for any other offense; and a \$250,000 fine.

Title 8, United States Code, Section 1324(a)(1)(A)(iv) and (v)(II) - Inducing Illegal Aliens to the Enter the United States and Aiding and Abetting.

Maximum penalties: Five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine per count.

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation

United States Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement

United States Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection

San Diego Police Department

San Diego County Sheriff's Department

An Indictment itself is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.